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ABSTRACT

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) offer employees confidential, professional assistance for the kinds of personal problems that adversely affect their lives and their jobs. These programs started when acute worker shortages during World War II, coupled with the successes of Alcoholic Anonymous, prompted some companies in the 1940s to develop programs to rehabilitate alcoholic employees. EAPs gradually expanded throughout the country--one can now find more than 10,000 EAPs--and grew to address a variety of employee problems. EAPs usually consist of four major components: (1) identification; (2) motivation; (3) referral; and (4) follow-up. The kind of EAP an organization needs depends upon the organization's philosophy, size, culture, location, and financial resources. Some of the important variables that need to be considered when setting up an EAP include whether to have an internal or external program; whether a fellow employee or an outside contractor should administer the program and perform the counseling; the kinds of services to be offered; the formation of an advisory committee, along with a written policy to guide the program; how to make the program known to workers; record keeping and statistics; and evaluation of the process and the outcome. In many administer the programs and perform the organizations, EAPs are becoming an integral part of the organizational structure. (RJM)

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by Thomas C. Desmond

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New Jersey Alcohol / Drug

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Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

FACTS ON EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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The American population from which the nation's workforce is drawn is not without problems. Over 40% of the marriages in the United States end in divorce. One out of four families complains of a serious alcohol or drug problem. Of the 100 million Americans who use alcohol, nearly 18 million are alcohol abusers or alcoholics. One third of the people in our society will seek some kind of professional help for an emotional or mental health problem during their lifetime.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) offer employees confidential, professional assistance for the kinds of personal problems that adversely affect their lives and their jobs. EAPs evolved both because of the need to resolve problems that were interfering with job performance and to complement the efforts of employee relations and occupational medicine that historically had attempted to deal with these problems with marginal results.

The acute shortages of workers in the early 1940s caused by World War II, coupled with the successful recoveries of alcoholics through Alcoholics Anonymous, led companies such as E.I. Du Pont and Eastman Kodak to develop programs to rehabilitate alcoholic employees. These programs were the genesis of the occupational alcoholism programs of the fifties and sixties. A 1970 study of these programs by the National Council on Alcoholism showed that close to half of the employees using these occupational alcoholism programs also presented problems not related to alcohol. As a result of this study, programs became more comprehensive and began to deal with a variety of personal problems in addition to alcoholism, leading to the development of the modern, comprehensive EAP. During this same period, the identification of the "troubled employee" through the observation and documentation of poor job performance became a program standard.

At the present time, there are more than 10,000 EAPs throughout the country. The number of these programs is expected to increase substantially during the next decade as a result of their successes in both the public and private sectors. These successes have been measured in human terms

through recovery and job performance improvement and in such cost containment terms as the reduction of health care costs, absenteeism, and workers' compensation claims. The current emphasis on the nationwide drug problem and the 1988 Drug Free Workplace Act, which strongly encourages the establishment of EAPs throughout the nation's business communities, are proving to be a strong impetus for this growth.

EAPs offer employees, and in some cases their family members, confidential, professional assistance for personal problems related but not limited to alcohol and other drugs, marriage, family, mental health, and finances. Confidentiality is the cornerstone of any successful EAP.

EAPs consist of four major components:

- **Identification**: Through education and information, employees are taught to identify personal problems that are adversely affecting them and to seek help. Through training, supervisors are taught to identify and to refer to EAP the "troubled employee" by observing and documenting deteriorating job performance.
- **Motivation**: Assessment of the employee and the problem is made through counseling, and, in the case of a supervisory referral, the probability of job loss is assessed. The employee is then motivated to accept a plan to resolve the problem.
- **Referral**: The employee is referred to appropriate community resources. These resources may be professionals in specialized fields, public and private agencies, rehabilitation facilities, inpatient/outpatient programs, and/or self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous.
- **Follow-up**: Monitoring is used to ensure the appropriateness of the referral and participation of the employee in a recommended problem resolution plan.

The decisions about the kind of EAP an organization needs are dependent upon that organization's philosophy, size, culture, location, and financial resources. An advisory committee representing management, the union (if one is present), and employee representatives who reflect the employee population should be formed at this time to help the organization select the most appropriate EAP. This committee oversees the implementation and administration of the program after the selection of the EAP has been made. The advisory committee helps the organization explore its attitudes and responses toward those employees with personal problems that might be interfering with their job performance. It oversees a needs assessment of management, the union, and the employees to decide the kinds of problems that exist within the organization. It then helps the organization analyze the various kinds of EAP designs that might meet its needs.

Some of the more important variables in EAP design that need to be considered are:

- **Internal or external program**: Whether the program should be located and operated on the organization's site or off-site.

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•**Employee vs contractor**: Whether the program should be administered and the counseling done by an employee of the organization, or contracted out to an individual consultant, a public or private agency, or a private firm that specializes in furnishing employee assistance services.

•**Services**: The kinds of problems addressed by EAPs may be specific (alcohol and other drugs only) or the program may be comprehensive. Services may or may not be available to family members. The program should include assessment, referral, follow-up, and/or counseling. Program promotion, employee education, and management training should be included. Consultation should be available to union and management, and reports should be issued to appropriate personnel.

•**Advisory committee**: An advisory committee is formed to help oversee the implementation and administration of the program. This committee can also help in the development of policy and furnishing feedback to the EAP administrator or consultant.

•**Policy**: The policy is a written statement to the employee. It reflects the philosophy of the organization and its relationship to employees with personal problems that are affecting their jobs. It spells out what the organization is ready to do and what the employee is expected to do through the EAP, and also explains personnel policies and health care benefits available to resolve these problems.

•**Promotion**: It is necessary to promote the existence and services of the EAP. Promotional activities usually include a letter introducing and supporting the program sent to all employees by a senior executive (preferably the chief executive officer), employee education, and supervisor training. Training and education usually are ongoing. Other promotional activities include brochures, articles in the company newspaper, desktops, and mailers. The best promotion for the program is the employee with the resolved problem or the satisfied manager.

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•**Record keeping and statistics**: The keeping of accurate confidential records and the collection of statistical data are most important for both client and management. Client needs are met through quality case management, and management needs are met by accurate statistics and information presented in a manner that does not breach program confidentiality.

•**Evaluation:** The areas of employee assistance programs that need to be evaluated are *process* and *outcome*. The ***process*** is the array of activities in which the EAP engages in order to accomplish its goals, and it is quantitative and measurable. It includes counting, analyzing, and making judgements about such things as the number and demography of the clients, number of referrals, types of referrals, assessments, etc. The ***outcomes*** are the goals the EAP accomplished as a result of the activities in which the EAP engaged. Although both quantitative and qualitative, it is the qualitative aspect of the program that is emphasized in outcome evaluation. The qualitative evaluation counts, analyzes, and makes judgements about such things as quality of services, treatment and resolution of the employees' problems, changes in job performance, absenteeism, etc.

A systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of EAPs has not evolved at the same pace as growth in the number of programs. Confidentiality and the reluctance of organizations to support research and the concomitant expense have impeded any significant overall evaluation. Many studies have not met the standards of rigorous research. However, even with these limitations, many have shown reductions in absenteeism and health care costs, as well as improved job performance.

In most of the larger and more progressive corporations, at all levels of government, and in many organizations, both public and private, EAPs are becoming an integral part of the organizational structure.

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